

Frequently-Asked Questions

Safety Questions

Here are answers to some questions that people have asked about safety issues.

Q. What are the safety concerns related to in-situ burning (ISB)?

A. Burning presents some unique safety concerns for workers and response personnel. These are some of the concerns:

Fire Hazard: ISB is a process that involves setting fires. Extreme care must be taken so that the fires are controlled at all times, and will not harm personnel or equipment.

Ignition Hazard: Planners must carefully consider the ignition of the oil slick. Aerial operations to ignite oil with gel or other ignition methods must be well-coordinated. Weather and water conditions should be kept in mind, and proper safety distances should be observed at all times. Communication with all personnel is essential.

Vessel Safety: ISB at sea involves several vessels working in relatively close proximity to each other or in poor-visibility conditions. Such conditions are hazardous by nature, and require practice, competence, and coordination.

Other Hazards: Personnel involved in ISB may be exposed to extreme heat from the compounded effects of hot weather and fire, or extreme cold, in places like Alaska. Working under time constraints may impair judgment or increase the tendency to attempt costly shortcuts. Thorough training and strict safety guidelines must be part of any ISB operation.

Q. How do you control an ISB and avoid spreading of the fire?

A. The fire is usually contained in a fire resistant boom. Oil can be burned in an area physically remote from other sources of oil, or a boom can be used to isolate oil for burning. The goal of ISB is to avoid accidentally igniting oil outside the boomed area. If there is a potential of igniting oil outside the boomed area, burning will not be conducted.

Q. Is burning the oil safer than other clean-up methods?

A. All clean-up methods have safety concerns for the responders. Response personnel involved in ISB are trained and outfitted to conduct this procedure in a safe manner. In addition, safety and human health specialists monitor their operations for safety.
